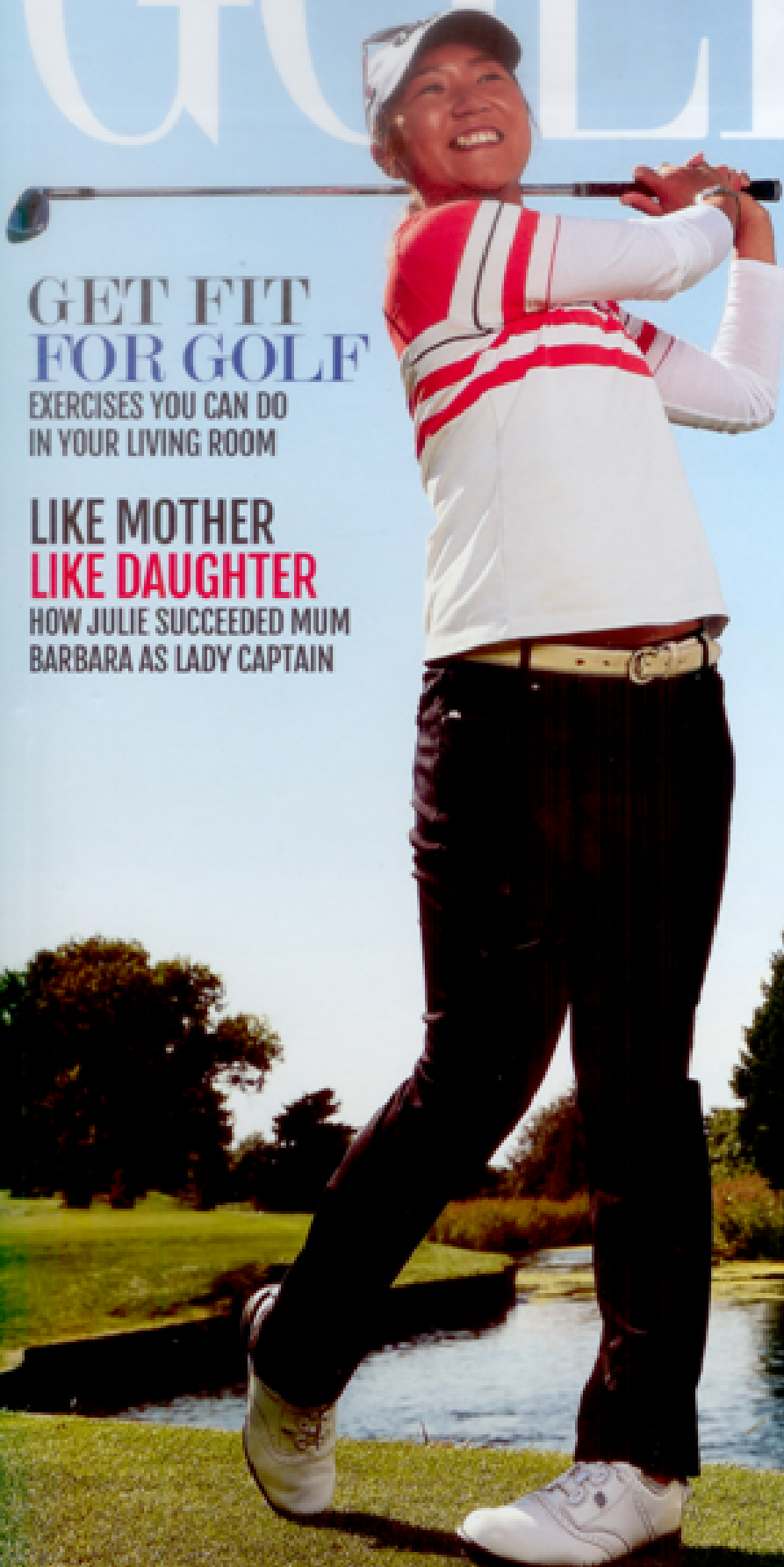


LADY GOLFER



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A portrait of golfer Lydia Ko. She is wearing a white Callaway baseball cap and a white Callaway zip-up jacket over a yellow shirt. A shawl with a Union Jack pattern is draped over her shoulders. She is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a dark, textured wall.

COOL CALM & COLLECTED

THE
GOLFER
INTERVIEW

The world No 1 golfer, Lydia Ko, is fabulous. Fabulous beyond her 19 tender years. Richard Simmons caught up with her in Florida

Tell us about Team Ko?

The whole team is David Leadbetter, JJ Rivet (biomechanics), Sean Hogan, Trevoise Anderson (performance coach) and Mark Sweeney (AimPoint putting). It's quite a big team. Dr Lair for the mind game stuff, and then there's Brit, who I call my third coach, he knows what goes on with my swing and I trust him more with my clubs than I do with my clubs.

What do you regard as being the strengths of your game?

I think irons shots, just going for the pin, giving myself good opportunities. With all the irons, I don't really have a favourite. The big goal last year was we focused on improving green in regulation percentages. I think I ended up coming second, so I definitely improved percentage-wise. It's about putting yourself in good positions and giving yourself opportunities. I know I can hole putts.

Do you keep a record of your stats – are you analytical in that way?

I'm not a huge numbers person. I like to see what's in front of me on the golf course rather than think about stats and what I'm involved in. David likes numbers. He gets the feedback from each event so we can target certain areas when we practice. I can see the benefit in that – but I don't have to worry about figures. He might pick up on a pattern, say, from the 13th to 15th hole I make most



Ko meeting fans at the Masters

bogeys – so maybe I need to eat some fruit or take on some water or whatever. But the information goes to David. I told the guy at the stats company, 'just send it all to David – he can make sense of it all!' Otherwise it's just too much information.

You were born in 1997 – the year Tiger won his first major. You were 11 when he won his last major.

Everyone in the golf industry knows Tiger. Everyone outside the industry knows Tiger. You see the name, you know what he has done for golf. He has been the biggest influence on the game. But coming from Asia, my hero as a young girl was Si Re Pak [another



Leadbetter protege in the early days]. My father took me to see her at a tournament in Korea when I was six. I thought it was the most amazing thing, the way she made the ball fly. She was one of the first Koreans to be on the tour, to succeed, to win tournaments and win Majors. She brought a lot of energy back to Korea. So did K.J. Choi, Y.E. Yang. I remember him beating Tiger [in the US PGA]. That's where I came from, that type of background. I've always looked up to Phil Mickelson, also, and Michelle [Wie].

Have you played any golf with the PGA Tour stars, like fellow Callaway staffer Phil Mickelson?

No, not really. I was at Callaway and they asked me who's your favourite player and I told them it was Phil. So they called him up – he lives near the Callaway headquarters in San Diego – and he came out in shorts, all relaxed. He brought a signed British Open flag as it was the year after he won at Muirfield. He was just cool.

Do you think your game suits a particular style of golf course?

I look back over last year and there were different styles. Royal Melbourne, sand belt course, then you go to Evian, overlooking that beautiful lake, and it's a little softer. I probably enjoy Evian course more than most, I've always

LYDIA ON BEING WORLD NO.1

'I don't really think about it unless I'm at a prize-giving or announcement. I'm just out there playing with all the girls, we don't care about records, who is the youngest, or whatever. But every now and again, when you get announced on the tee, I go, 'Oh yeah, that's me.'

played well there, you can be creative. Even for me, I use the slopes to bring the ball in. I like how you can do that. I am trying to be more that way in my game.

How do you manage your schedule/travel/home life?

I like to have my people around me - my team. There is so much to think about, so much to do. Obviously that has changed a little recently, there are more demands. It's so hard to say no, but you have to balance it out. You guys want to talk to me because I'm playing well - if I was missing cuts you probably wouldn't be here!

What do you do to relax away from golf?

I like to listen to music a lot but I mean fun music, not slow stuff. I love Lady Gaga, One-D, Rihanna. I don't really like

dance music. I love Adele. She's amazing.

She was great in James Corden's car karaoke...

Oh yes, she was brilliant. I've seen all of those - Rod Stewart, One Direction, Elton John, Stevie Wonder - but Adele is the best. Just so funny. And what a voice. I like to watch movies too. And I like shooting...

What, shooting?

Yeah [laughs]. I mean I like shoot-em-up movies, action, thriller. I don't mean I like shooting. Ha ha, that's so funny. I'm not into the romance thing. Too boring.

Now you've past your driving test you're young, free, mobile and single?

Ha! I only have my learner's licence. I have to have someone with me in the car. When you drive on a Learner's you are restricted, you can only drive between certain hours of the day with a guardian. Right now, I'm quite happy with that. I don't ever really need to drive anywhere without my dad or my sister. It's not legal until you have the written test.

How would you describe the performance of your Lexus RC F Coupe?

Well, it's got turbo engines! I don't know how many, but it's fast. Probably too fast for a new driver like me, which is why

I take it very easy. I love how low and grounded it is, I feel super-grounded. Especially when it gets windy, the car feels so stable. It seems to stick to the road. And it brakes really well, too. I mean it's a fast car so it better have good brakes, right? But I saw it on the ads and I just thought it looked so cool. It was blue in the ads, so I just said to my agent, 'I want that car - in that exact colour'.

You live just around the corner at Reunion Resort with your family - are you into cooking?

I don't mind but I don't like cleaning up my mess. My mom does the cooking and she's brilliant. I finish late most days if I am at home working at Champions Gate. Mom creates some great Korean food. We eat Korean all the time. I can do some stuff - I'm good at copying things, like a recipe from a book, and it will taste good. But I couldn't just eyeball a dish and make something up. The fire alarm went off the last time I tried to make noodles.

How big a goal this season is the Olympics?

I think the Olympics is my biggest goal. An Olympic medal would be great, but just to say that I am an Olympian would be a dream come true, just in that sense. I think the Olympics is the biggest goal; since the day they announced it I said my goal was to be in that team. I'm not sure



PGA TOUR Player of the Year Awards: Ko & Spieth

I will stay in the Village. I can't see why golf shouldn't be in the Olympics.

Biomechanics is enjoying huge popularity in golf - how much has JJ influenced your understanding of the way your body works?

Oh massively. And the great thing is that when you stop and consider the way your body moves - or should move, efficiently - you actually learn and recognise what good movement in the swing is like. And it can be on something as apparently simple as a three-foot putt - the way your body is positioned and works is just as important here as it is in the full swing. Just the other day I was struggling to get into a good backswing and JJ spotted that I was tight all down my right side - so the fix wasn't a swing fix, it was a massage fix. Which I think is better! One area we have definitely improved is footwork. JJ fitted me for





All smiles at the LPGA Las Vegas Championship

new orthotics in my golf shoes and that helps me with balance and the correct transfer of weight. It really makes a difference. Actually, it has helped me to feel and gauge speed and break on the green, too.

How do you describe the principles of the the A Swing?

My swing now with David is definitely different to the way it was before I came here two years ago. I mean, there are so many different types of swing. Look around the range. But for me I am not trying to swing it on a flat line, a single plane. When you hear David explain it, it makes a lot of sense, the way that the backswing works inside then up and across ready to fall naturally onto plane coming down. You know, you can see this even if I were to stand and throw a ball – there would be more power me doing it like this [stands up to demonstrate] than like this. Fluid motion, the change of direction, the hit position. It all makes sense. The baseball

drill is a great example of the way we use instincts to play consistent golf. At the end of the day, the A Swing is about synchronisation, how to blend arms and body together, how to simplify the path of the swing and the efficiency back to the ball.

How do you find the travelling? Do you enjoy that aspect of your life?

I like it. It can be tiring on your body, but I like seeing different places and experiencing different cultures. I see it as something to enjoy when you're young. Trying different things. I'm a foodie, so that aspect of it is great. You go to places like Singapore where it is so modern. Then you go to Scotland or the UK and it's almost like living in the generation before. I like to experience this stuff, so many different cultures. I enjoy visiting new cities.

Not everyone who does what you do for a living would pick up on the differences – a lot of players seem to

LYDIA'S RETIREMENT PLANS

'Golfing-wise, I want to retire at 30. Then I want a year to travel. I'm a big foodie, I want to try everything I possibly can. When we go to a tournament, we get a condo with a kitchen. My mom is there and she cooks Korean food and it's almost like a part of my routine.'

travel in a vacuum.

It's easy to miss what is around you. I like it. I think that comes from growing up in New Zealand, where you are just so aware of the natural beauty around you. If everywhere was just the same one whole big country life would be pretty boring.

Where would you choose to live, to settle down?

When I retire I want to go to Queenstown, NZ, because there is nothing, and I mean nothing to do. Great for physical activities, water activities. But no city life. At that age, 50 say, I would be ready.

A first major title, world No.1, a million dollars in the bonus pool – 2015 will be hard to beat. What did you do to celebrate?

I took the whole team out to dinner. We went to a Korean restaurant called Buyon, and everyone was there with their family. All the coaches who are based at DLGA Champions Gate, my family, 'Team Lydia'. They don't usually open on Monday but they opened for us and we had a great time.

Any special treats?

No. My sister bought me a Prada bag. I like to get little things that I like on the way but not really plan for anything big. I'm not really into that sort of stuff,

the fashion scene or getting dressed up. There are some girls who like to get dressed up and look glamorous. I prefer to put on my jeans and a hoodie – anything that's comfortable.

Do you miss wearing the glasses?

It still feels weird. I wear contacts now. Even when I first started wearing contacts I wore plain glasses for a while, they were just like windows – I didn't like the way I looked without them. But last year around this time I decided to lose the glasses, and it's been great. The contacts have made such a difference. I think maybe next year or the year after I may look at laser surgery.

In the world as a whole, who inspires you?

My life role model is Nick Vujicic. You won't ever have heard of him. He's Australian, but he lives in California. He has no limbs – no arms, no legs. A birth defect. He's tried to commit suicide. But he has learned to accept who he is and live life to the full. He has learned to swim, to surf, to skydive, he speaks to thousands of people.

I mean, people like him... this is such a cliché but they just put everything into perspective. I find myself saying 'I wish I had this or that, I wish I was two inches taller, I wish, I wish...'. He probably wishes he had one arm. It's amazing how positive he is.

'I LIKE TO HAVE MY PEOPLE AROUND ME – MY TEAM.'

So many top golfers on the European and PGA Tours display huge ego and attitude, how do you remain so grounded?

I think it's the power of the team. Think about it. If you come out here alone and work your way up to being a winner, the best, and you have done it solo then that is something pretty amazing – and we all know golf is an individual sport. But I couldn't have achieved what I have achieved without my whole team and my mom, my dad and my sister. They give me the confidence to go out and play.

When you start competing in pro events at 14 – you have to grow up quickly...

If you think about it, the older players and all of the other people in the game are not going to come to my level – I have to go to theirs. That's the way I see it. If I'm talking to someone like Julie Inkster, she's not going to behave like an 18 year old, I have to try to raise myself to her level. But I have a great group of friends on tour who keep me sensible. In Korea it's called an unni, it's what a girl calls an older girl who is special to her. Someone you look up to and respect. Danielle Kang is probably my best unni, my big sister, then there's Jane Park, Christina Kim, Michelle [Wie]. They are like my older sisters. And Jessica Korda, she's my little bottle-of-a-sweetheart.

